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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/RSA (ZUEHLKE) AND G/TIP (YOUSEY)

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SUBJECT: EMBOFFS PRESENT G/TIP REPORT TO NEW GOM MINISTER

11. (U) SUMMARY. Charge and Poloff paid an introductory call ON Malawi's newly appointed Minister of Gender, Child Welfare, and Community Services, Joyce Banda. The minister was unfamiliar with the issue of human trafficking and Malawi's G/TIP Tier Two - Watch List status, and agreed the issue should be addressed. Her staff, however, did not believe new legislation to criminalize human trafficking is necessary. She also discussed her views on gender issues, her experience in the United States, and her background. Biographic notes begin in paragraph 4. END SUMMARY.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

12. (U) Charge and poloff presented trafficking in persons information to Joyce Banda, Malawi's Minister of Gender, Child Welfare, and Community Services in a July 14 introductory call. The issue of Human Trafficking was obviously deeply disturbing to Banda, whose first reply was "thank you for ruining my day." Banda said she was "very concerned" about the fact that it is perceived to be a problem in Malawi, and noted that it is a "complicated subject requiring careful study." She believes that though U.S. law assumes that all underage prostitutes are trafficking victims, the interpretation is not accurate in Malawi where 15% of children live in households headed by another child and HIV/AIDS is a major crisis, causing orphaned teenagers to turn to prostitution for economic survival. Banda noted, however, that there are other ways for young girls to make money, and lamented the fact that educational and economic resources to encourage such options are extremely limited. Economic empowerment, she said, is the key to social and political empowerment, all of which would reduce the likelihood of a girl becoming a trafficking victim.

13. (U) Banda was eager to learn more about human trafficking and indicated she would attend a USG hosted human trafficking symposium scheduled in late July. She noted that the GOM's resources are severely constrained and expressed hope that the USG would partner with the GOM to combat the problem.

14. (U) Banda's Principal Secretary (PS) was reluctant to agree that Malawian law should specifically criminalize human trafficking, making the argument that the current penal code is strong enough to convict traffickers. The PS also took the position that prostitution is often a means of survival - albeit a last resort - for unskilled and uneducated women.

A PERSONAL DEBT TO THE USG

14. (SBU) Banda indicated she felt a great personal debt to the USG. She participated in an International Visitor Program in 1989, and while in the U.S. had direct contact with American women's organizations and presented academic papers in Washington D.C. She used her experience in the U.S. as a model for the organizations she has since started in Malawi. In 1990 she established the National Association of Business Women, which has assisted over 27,000 women and disbursed USD 2 million in loans. In 1997 she founded the Joyce Banda Foundation for Better Girls' Education, which, according to Banda, sponsors over 630 students and provides care and housing for over 550 orphans. In October of 1997 she was awarded the African Leadership Prize for the Sustainable End to Hunger. In 1998 she negotiated the establishment of The Hunger Project in Malawi. In 2000 she founded the Young Emerging Leaders Network, which aims to increase young business people in networking.

BIODATA, CONTINUED

15. (SBU) Banda is the wife of former Chief Justice Richard Banda, who is her second husband. She said her first marriage was abusive and that she left with three small children and started her own business. According to Banda, the previous dictatorial regime in Malawi did not like her actions to organize and assist women, and fearing persecution she once "hid out" at what was then the USIS building.

16. (U) Banda has a BA in early childhood education and has worked as a secretary and ran a bakery. Her limited

political experience includes a year as the treasurer of a rural village committee and three years (2000-2003) as the District Secretary of the Woman's Wing of the Zomba Urban Constituency. In 2003 she became the National Director of Women's Affairs, and was elected to Parliament in May 2004. In 1995, she delivered a speech at the International Conference on Women in Beijing, and has spoken at numerous other conferences around the world. She has twice been voted Malawi's Woman of the Year (1997 and 1998.)

COMMENT

16. (SBU) Banda said in the meeting that women and children are her passion, and her career underlines her commitment. Her significant accomplishments to boost the status of women in one of the world's poorest countries are remarkable. Banda also noted that she "didn't get here (to her position as minister) by accident" and from what we can see she has indeed worked her way up. When presented with the issue of human trafficking, Banda seemed eager to engage other GOM officials on the issue but was not confident that GOM funds will be available to assist. The views expressed by her PS lead us to believe he will not be an advocate for strengthening Malawi's existing criminal statute with regard to human trafficking.

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